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Approved For Release 2003/12/11 : CIA-RDP75B00514R000200260008-9

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Covert Civilian Overflights of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

1. This memorandum contains a recommendation for the approval of the Director of Central Intelligence. Such recommendation is contained in paragraph 6.

2. With prospects in sight for a Vietnam ceasefire and the obvious necessity to monitor compliance of the provisions of such agreement by sources other than fourth or fifth country observers, it is conceivable that civilian operated A-12 (OXCART) aircraft can contribute significant photographic intelligence in the National interest.

3. Comparative capabilities of the SR-71 and the A-12 show that the A-12 is clearly the superior aircraft for this type mission. For example:

a. Photography: The A-12 Type I camera produces a swath width of 60 miles, with 3 foot resolution at the outer extremities and 12 inch resolution at nadir. The SR-71 optical bar camera produces a similar swath width, but with severely degraded resolution at the high obliquities. Since the A-12 camera is carried in the Q-bay, rather than in the nose as in the case of the SR-71, the photographic platform is considerably more stable, which increases the potential quality of photography.

b. Vulnerability:

(1) The A-12 has a distinctly lower probability of kill, in that it has a 2,000 to 5,000 feet operating altitude advantage over the SR-71. In the environment in which these aircraft operate, this altitude differential is significant.

NRO review(s)
completed.

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(2) The A-12 carries only one crew member, thereby, minimizing the problems in case of loss.

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4. Preliminary feasibility studies of this topic within OSA have concluded that:

a. Four operational and one trainer aircraft can be reactivated to meet this requirement should it materialize.

b. To provide adequate coverage, three operational aircraft should be deployed to a covert base in the Pacific. One operational aircraft and the trainer would be retained within the CONUS [redacted] to satisfy the test and training requirements in support of the operationally deployed vehicles.

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c. Civilian pilots with former A-12 or SR-71 experience can be retained within 30 to 45 days after the first aircraft becomes available.

d. Initially, partial material support for the restored aircraft can be provided from the stored support kit; however, previous queries relative to the status of kit assets have indicated that some were loaned to other programs and some lost through disposal actions. This necessitates a detailed inventory to determine those which are retrievable and those which require replacement to re-establish the kit in total.

5. Detailed data related to such reactivation are not presently available; however, preliminary studies are now being conducted to determine reactivation costs, positive timetables, feasibility of reclamation of dispersed support assets, availability of personnel, and other related items. It is estimated that reasonably accurate details can be provided within three to four weeks if the foregoing concept is approved.

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6. I recommend that OSA/DDS&T be authorized to proceed on an expedited basis with studies as outlined in paragraph 5 above. OSA does not anticipate that these studies will entail budgetary changes.

GEORGE A. CARVER, JR.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

The recommendation contained in paragraph 6 is approved.

51 Mr. Helms
Director of Central Intelligence

11-30-72 {Per ER)
Date [Redacted] 2/6/74

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